

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the instant application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of connecting businesses through common interests and for facilitating business relationships among businesses comprising:

identifying a plurality of businesses to participate in an online business registry;

storing business profiles comprising business attributes in an online business registry, wherein each business profile is associated with one of the identified businesses and includes for each identified business one or more market segments associated with the identified business, a corresponding customer list for each of said market segments, one or more at least one business functions associated with each of said market segments ~~the identified business, and at least one market segment associated with the identified business, [[and]]~~ wherein the business attributes corresponding to each of the market segments associated with a stored business profile are classified into one of a plurality of access levels;

responsive to a query from an inquiring business, searching said online business registry to locate at least one business having a business profile including at least one business attributes corresponding to said query;

for each of the market segments associated with the inquiring business, determining whether the inquiring business and at least one located business are competitors in said market segment based upon a comparison of customer lists associated with the market segment[[,]] and associated business functions, ~~and associated market segments;~~

~~restricting access of the inquiring business to less than all of the plurality of access levels of business attributes of the at least one located business if the at least one located business and inquiring business are determined to be competitors;~~

establishing at least one communications link between said inquiring business and said located business according to at least one business attribute of said business profile of said located business; and

providing access to the inquiring business to at least a portion of the business attributes of the located business, wherein access to the business attributes of said located business corresponding to one of said market segments is restricted to less than all of the plurality of access levels if the located business and the inquiring business are determined to be competitors in said one of said market segments.

2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein said online business registry conforms to a Universal Description Discovery and Integration (UDDI) specification, and wherein said searching step comprises searching said online business registry according to said query, wherein said specified business attribute is common to said inquiring business.

3. (Original) The method of claim 1, wherein said storing step comprises storing business attributes selected from the group consisting of business identity information, business description information, and communications information.

4. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein said establishing a communications link step comprises extracting said communications information from said business profile of said located business.

5. (Original) The method according to claim 3, wherein said storing step further comprises:

defining access rights to said business profiles;

defining permissible communications links and points of contact as business attributes within said business profiles; and

defining selected business attributes of said business profiles as private.

6. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein said establishing a communications link step further comprises authenticating at least said inquiring business.

7. (Currently Amended) A method of connecting businesses through common interests comprising:

storing business profiles for a plurality of businesses, said business profiles comprising business attributes in an online business registry, wherein each business profile is associated with one of said plurality of businesses, wherein each business profile identifies a corresponding business by one or more market segments occupied by said business, list of customers for each of said market segments, and business function performed by the corresponding business in said market segments, and wherein the business attributes corresponding to said market segments for each stored business profile are classified into one of a plurality of access levels;

responsive to a query from an inquiring business specifying at least one business attribute, locating within said online business registry business profiles corresponding to said specified business attribute;

for each of said market segments associated with the inquiring business, determining whether the inquiring business and at least one located business are competitors in said market segment based upon a comparison of ~~market segments and~~

business functions in said market segment corresponding to the inquiring business and at least one located business;

~~restricting access of the inquiring business to less than all of the plurality of access levels of business attributes of the at least one located business if the at least one located business and inquiring business~~

permitting access to the inquiring business to at least a portion of the business attributes of the located business, wherein access to the business attributes of said located business corresponding to one of said market segments is restricted to less than all of the plurality of access levels if the located business and the inquiring business are determined to be competitors in said one of said market segments;

identifying within said located business profiles references to other business profiles contained within said online business registry; and

determining whether said other business profiles include business attributes corresponding to said query, wherein said plurality of businesses comprise businesses associated with said located business profiles, businesses associated with said other business profiles, and said inquiring business.

8. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 7, further comprising:

establishing a communications link between said inquiring business and at least one of said other businesses having a business attribute corresponding to said query, wherein the communication link is established according to business attributes of said at least one other business.

9. (Original) The method of claim 7, wherein said locating step locates within said online business registry business profiles corresponding to said specified business attribute, wherein said specified business attribute is a business identity.

10. (Original) The method of claim 7, wherein said locating step comprises locating in said online business registry, business profiles associated with said specified business attribute of said query, wherein said specified business attribute is common to said inquiring business.

11. (Original) The method of claim 7, wherein said storing step comprises storing business attributes selected from the group consisting of business identity information, business description information, and communications information.

12. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 11, wherein said establishing a communications link step comprises extracting said communications information from said business profile of at least one of said other businesses, and wherein said online business registry conforms to a Universal Description Discovery and Integration (UDDI) specification.

13. (Original) The method according to claim 11, wherein said storing step further comprises:

defining access rights to said business profiles;

defining permissible communications links and points of contact as business attributes within said business profiles; and

defining selected business attributes of said business profiles as private.

14 (Original) The method of claim 11, wherein said establishing a communications link step further comprises authenticating at least said inquiring business.

15. (Currently Amended) A system for connecting businesses through business profiles comprising:

an online business registry configured to store business profiles for a plurality of participating businesses, wherein each of said business profiles corresponds to one of said participating businesses and comprises business attributes that include one or more market segments associated with the participating business, at least one business function associated with each of said market segments for [[of]] the participating business, ~~at least one market segment of the participating business~~, and communications information for establishing a communications link to ~~each other of~~ the participating businesses;

a registration application configured to collect said business attributes of said business profiles and store said business profiles within said online business registry;

a search engine configured to receive queries and search said business profiles to locate at least one other business profile corresponding to said query, wherein one of said participating businesses utilizes said search engine to obtain information about another one of said participating businesses, and wherein said search engine is configured to determine for each of the market segments associated with the participating business whether the participating business utilizing said search engine is a competitor in said market segment of another participating business located by the search based upon a comparison of business functions associated with said market segment, ~~so as to restrict access of the participating business utilizing said search engine to information of the other participated business determined when each is determined to be a competitor of the other~~ so as to provide access to the participating business to at least a portion of the business attributes of the other participating business, wherein access to portions of the business attributes of the other participating business corresponding to one of said market segments is restricted if the other participating business and the participating business are determined to be competitors in said one of said market segments; and

a communications engine configured to establish a communications link between at least two businesses of said participating businesses having profiles included in said online business registry, said communications link being established according to at least

one business parameter within at least one of said business profiles associated with said at least two businesses, wherein said communications link is established by establishing one of a telephone call, a conference call, and a video conference based upon communication information contained at least one of the plurality of business attributes.

16. (Currently Amended) A machine-readable storage having stored thereon, a computer program having a plurality of code sections, said code sections executable by a machine for causing the machine to perform the steps of:

identifying a plurality of businesses to participate in an online business registry;

storing business profiles comprising business attributes in an online business registry, wherein each business profile is associated with one of the identified businesses and includes for each identified business one or more market segments associated with the identified business, a corresponding customer list for each of said market segments, one or more ~~at least one~~ business functions associated with each of said market segments ~~the identified business~~, and ~~at least one market segment associated with the identified business~~, ~~[[and]]~~ wherein the business attributes corresponding to each of the market segments associated with a stored business profile are classified into one of a plurality of access levels;

responsive to a query from an inquiring business, searching said online business registry to locate at least one business having a business profile including at least one business attributes corresponding to said query;

for each of the market segments associated with the inquiring business, determining whether the inquiring business and at least one located business are competitors in said market segment based upon a comparison of customer lists associated with the market segment ~~[[,]]~~ and associated business functions, ~~and associated market segments~~;

~~restricting access of the inquiring business to less than all of the plurality of access levels of business attributes of the at least one located business if the at least one located business and inquiring business are determined to be competitors;~~

establishing at least one communications link between said inquiring business and said located business according to at least one business attribute of said business profile of said located business, and

providing access to the inquiring business to at least a portion of the business attributes of the located business, wherein access to at least a portion of the business attributes of said located business corresponding to one of said market segments is restricted if the located business and the inquiring business are determined to be competitors in said one of said market segments.

17. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable storage of claim 16, wherein said online business registry conforms to a Universal Description Discovery and Integration (UDDI) specification, and wherein said searching step comprises searching said online business registry according to said query, wherein said specified business attribute is common to said inquiring business.

18. (Original) The machine-readable storage of claim 16, wherein said storing step comprises storing business attributes selected from the group consisting of business identity information, business description information, and communications information.

19. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable storage of claim 16, wherein said establishing a communications link step comprises extracting said communications information from said business profile of said located business.

20. (Original) The machine-readable storage according to claim 18, wherein said storing step further comprises:

defining access rights to said business profiles;

defining permissible communications links and points of contact as business attributes within said business profiles; and

defining selected business attributes of said business profiles as private.

21. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable storage of claim 16, wherein said establishing a communications link step further comprises authenticating at least said inquiring business, and wherein selected ones of said business attributes are exposed only to inquiring businesses having corresponding business attributes.

22. (Currently Amended) A machine-readable storage, having stored thereon a computer program having a plurality of code sections executable by a machine for causing the machine to perform the steps of:

storing business profiles for a plurality of businesses, said business profiles comprising business attributes in an online business registry, wherein each business profile is associated with one of said plurality of businesses, wherein each business profile identifies a corresponding business by one or more market segments occupied by said business, list of customers for each of said market segments, and business function performed by the corresponding business in said market segments, and wherein the business attributes corresponding to said market segments for each stored business profile are classified into one of a plurality of access levels;

responsive to a query from an inquiring business specifying at least one business attribute, locating within said online business registry business profiles corresponding to said specified business attribute;

for each of said market segments associated with the inquiring business,
determining whether the inquiring business and at least one located business are
competitors in said market segment based upon a comparison of ~~market segments and~~
business functions in said market segment corresponding to the inquiring business and at
least one located business;

~~restricting access of the inquiring business to less than all of the plurality of access
levels of business attributes of the at least one located business if the at least one located
business and inquiring business~~

permitting access to the inquiring business to at least a portion of the business
attributes of the located business, wherein access to the business attributes of said located
business corresponding to one of said market segments is restricted to less than all of the
plurality of access levels if the located business and the inquiring business are determined
to be competitors in said one of said market segments;

identifying within said located business profiles references to other business
profiles contained within said online business registry; and

determining whether said other business profiles include business attributes
corresponding to said query, wherein said plurality of businesses comprise businesses
associated with said located business profiles, businesses associated with said other
business profiles, and said inquiring business.

23. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable storage of claim 22, further
comprising:

establishing a communications link between said inquiring business and at least
one of said other businesses having a business attribute corresponding to said query,
wherein the communication link is established according to business attributes of said at
least one other business.

24. (Original) The machine-readable storage of claim 22, wherein said locating step locates within said online business registry business profiles corresponding to said specified business attribute, wherein said specified business attribute is a business identity.

25. (Original) The machine-readable storage of claim 22, wherein said locating step comprises locating in said online business registry business profiles associated with said specified business attribute of said query, wherein said specified business attribute is common to said inquiring business.

26. (Original) The machine-readable storage of claim 22, wherein said storing step comprises storing business attributes selected from the group consisting of business identity information, business description information, and communications information.

27. (Previously Presented) The machine-readable storage of claim 26, wherein said establishing a communications link step comprises extracting said communications information from said business profile of at least one of said other businesses, and wherein said online business registry conforms to a Universal Description Discovery and Integration (UDDI) specification.

28. (Original) The machine-readable storage according to claim 26, wherein said storing step further comprises:

defining access rights to said business profiles;

defining permissible communications links and points of contact as business attributes within said business profiles; and

defining selected business attributes of said business profiles as private.

29. (Original) The machine-readable storage of claim 26, wherein said establishing a communications link step further comprises authenticating at least said inquiring business.

30. (Currently Amended) A method of connecting businesses through common interests comprising:

storing business profiles for a plurality of businesses comprising business attributes in an online business registry, said business profiles comprising a plurality of business attributes associated with each of said businesses;

responsive to a query from an inquiring business, searching said online business registry to locate at least one of said plurality of businesses having a business profile including at least one business attribute corresponding to said query, ~~said business profile including a plurality of business attributes~~ for each of said businesses including one or more market segments associated with each of said businesses, a customer list ~~of a~~ corresponding to said market segments business, at least one business function ~~of a~~ corresponding to said market segments business, ~~and at least one market segment of a~~ corresponding business;

for each of the market segments associated with the inquiring business, determining whether the inquiring business and at least one located business are competitors based upon a comparison of customer lists~~[[,]]~~ and associated business functions, ~~and associated market segments;~~

providing access to the inquiring business to at least a portion of the business attributes of the located business, wherein access to portions of the business attributes of said located business corresponding to one of said market segments is restricted if the located business and the inquiring business are determined to be competitors in said one of said market segments; and

establishing at least one communications link between said inquiring business and said located business according to at least one business attribute of said business profile of said located business and providing over said communications link an indication as to whether the inquiring business is a competitor of the located business with which said communications link is established;

wherein said at least one communications link is established by establishing at least one of a telephone call, a conference call, and a video conference.

31. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 30, wherein the business attributes include communication information, and wherein the at least one communications link is established based upon the communication information.

32. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 31, wherein the communication information comprises at least one of a preferred contact time and a pre-selected contact person.

33. (Previously Presented) The method of Claim 32, wherein the at least one communications link comprises a plurality of communications link, and wherein establishing at least one communications link further comprises selecting one of the plurality of communications links based on at least one of the preferred contact time and pre-selected contact person.